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LC girl examines politics up close at Girls' Nation

STAT

By Cheryl Michel

Heidi Rollins thinks she's a little more devious than your average straight A high school student.

She thinks it was this quality, plus a little common sense, that helped her have such a good time recently at Girls' Nation in Washington, D.C.

Girls' Nation is an annual program that offers hands-on government education for high school girls from across the country. Each state is represented by two "senators" who join with the others for mock campaigns and Senate sessions.

Heidi, a senior at Liberty Center High School, used her political cunning to land two regular offices—and she was the only girl at Nation to do that. Heidi served as state party chairman and director of administrative services, which means she advised the governor in appointing her cabinet.

AS PARTY chairman, she was intensively involved with the week-long mock election, and one highlight of Heidi's trip was "when my President won."

"People don't understand why you want to be the party chairman instead of the President," she said. "But, when you win the Presidency, you win once. When you're the party chairman, you win 53 different times, because I got all my people in office."

"It's like the power behind the scenes. I got more of a sense of accomplishment."

Heidi's prowess as party chairman helped her get what she wanted from her governor's advisory job.

What she wanted was the CIA. Following end-of-the-week elections, it was Heidi's job to help the governor appoint positions for Nation delegates who had not run for office or had lost. Heidi put in for herself as director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Achieving that position was her goal for the Girls' Nation week from the start. She explained, "There are a lot of things in this country that people don't know about and that would be detrimental for them to learn about." She laughed. "But I want to know!"

AS CIA director for Nation, Heidi was invited to visit the real CIA building outside Washington. "It's out in the middle of nowhere," she said, "and they treat you like royalty." Of course, Heidi somewhat looked the part of royalty anyway—all the Nation delegates were required to wear white gloves to meet their governmental "counterparts."

CIA Director William Casey was unavailable when the girl from Liberty Center came calling, but she did meet the executive director and a few other big wheels. "They seemed eager to get across that they aren't so bad as people think," she recalled.

NOT A FAN of small talk, Heidi said she asked, "Don't you ever get mad that Russia can pick up a world news report and read a lot more about you than you can gather on them in a year?"

The answer: Yes. "He didn't tell me much," she said, "but he did lead me to feel secure about our position with Russia."

"I'm not too worried about the country's safety from the outside, but from the inside I'm concerned. The free enterprise system is not stressed like it used to be—people are scared."

"People are too used to the government doing everything for them. And our free enterprise system is getting less and less important."

Heidi said she wasn't all that interested in politics before she went to Nation. She takes exception to those who find it an ugly business.

"It's only as ugly as the people who doing the politicking," she said. "Politics is interesting—it's an art form, almost."

STILL, "I really wouldn't choose politics as a career, but I plan to make it my... way of

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life, shall we say?" She plans to be a "good citizen" by paying attention to what her Congressman is doing, and Heidi says she may help out with a few campaigns, too.

As far as a career goes, Heidi does plan to enter Ohio State University next fall and "look into" business and marketing administration. "I want to be very successful—not in terms of money, although, of course, I'm not allergic to money. I just want to be the best that I can be."

She said she'll know she's reached that goal "when I stop and go on to something else."

She looks forward to that. "One thing that irks me is people who think that high school is the highlight of their life. They don't look ahead to the future."

WHAT IS it that Heidi looks ahead to?

"Getting married at 45."

For now, she keeps busy with school and her waitress job at the Wooden Nickel. Ask what her school activities are, and she's hesitant. "It doesn't come very easy to my tongue, because everybody at Girls' Nation did those things. It became redundant to say what you had done in school."

NEVERTHELESS. She's in her second year as Student Council president and last year was named one of two Outstanding Juniors at LCHS. She plays the altonium (E flat horn) in the band and has sung and acted in school musicals. Heidi is also a statistician for the baseball team and plays volleyball.

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ron Rollins of Liberty Center, she was a representative this summer to Ohio Girls' State at Ashland College. With 1,300 participants, Ohio Girls' State is the largest such program in the country.

That's why it was such an honor for Heidi and just one other Ohioan to be selected for Girls' Nation. Some states had as few as 15 girls to choose from.

SELECTION WAS based on recommendations and interviews by members of the American Legion Auxiliary, sponsors of the Girls' State and Girls' Nation programs. Generally, Heidi said, the interviewers were looking for the two "most politically active" participants at Girls' State to attend Nation.

Aside from the political side of the week, which also included heated Senate debates where few bills made it out of committee ("After all, we are 17-year-old girls, and we nitpick everything to death!"), the Nation delegates took in all the sights. They learned new songs, participated in Talent Night and made friends from all over the country.

Once, Heidi and the other Ohio delegate "made Senator Glenn about 10 or 15 minutes late for his next meeting, because we sat and talked."

And yet, in spite of the excitement and prestige of being a Girls' Nation delegate, "we were really humbled. When you first get to go to Girls' Nation, you think, 'wow, I must really be special to be chosen out of 1,300 girls.' But you get there and you realize how little you really know."